



INSIDE

*A publication supported and financed by
the Students' Union, The University of
Alberta, Edmonton.*

I N S I D E

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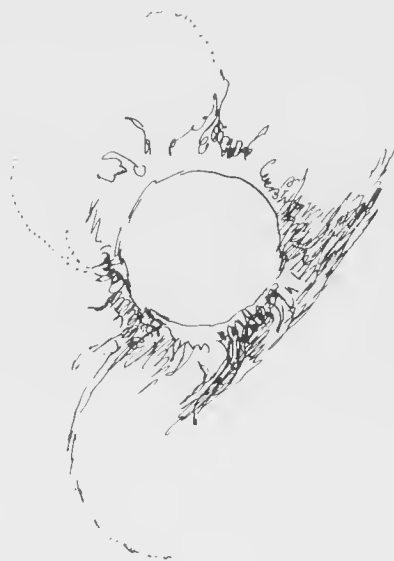
Graphics: Morilyn Solter, Suson
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Forrest Bord and back cover
by Morilyn Solter.

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No. 1

Vol. V

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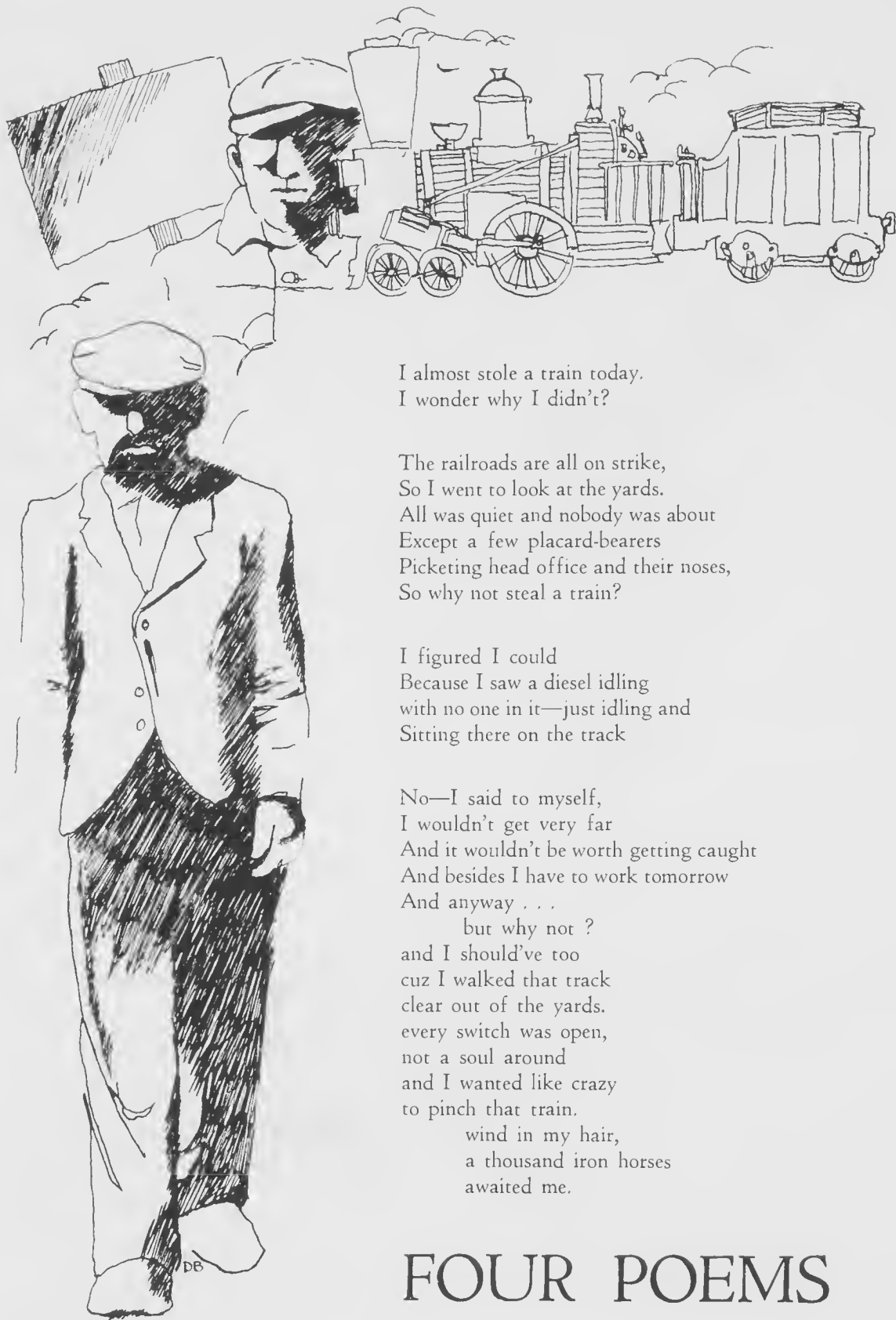
BEST GIRL RIDER

by

Ian Groves

Watching
 trembling shoulders
 anxious close-cropt
 hand in mane
 to win a ribbon
And my eyes moisten
 with her fluid moves
 and I tremble
 in the breathless hot-blue beauty
 of a prairie summer fair
It's so clear
 my eyes mist
 and it's blue and bleeding motion
 before me
 and it's pure
 pure
 I shiver
Recoiling from a
 glimpse
 of god
 in jeans





I almost stole a train today.
I wonder why I didn't?

The railroads are all on strike,
So I went to look at the yards.
All was quiet and nobody was about
Except a few placard-bearers
Picketing head office and their noses,
So why not steal a train?

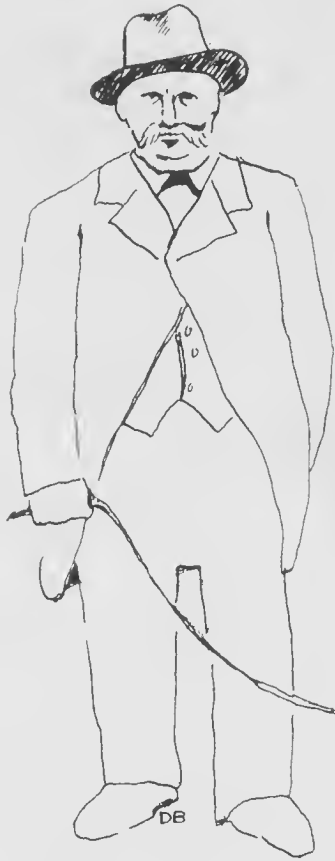
I figured I could
Because I saw a diesel idling
with no one in it—just idling and
Sitting there on the track

No—I said to myself,
I wouldn't get very far
And it wouldn't be worth getting caught
And besides I have to work tomorrow
And anyway . . .

but why not ?
and I should've too
cuz I walked that track
clear out of the yards.
every switch was open,
not a soul around
and I wanted like crazy
to pinch that train.

wind in my hair,
a thousand iron horses
awaited me.

FOUR POEMS



Down st. catherine's west
as far as we could go
no one welcomed us to westmount.
in fact, an old mustache
edged his poodle away from our love,
lumping his double-bitted words
like a friendly warning—get back, dog!-
englishly.

God, we discovered
rippling with bilingual fountains,
bristling with so many
concrete provinces
in a half-moon,
a park
empty save us, another dog-walker and a
friendly pervert who only stopped
to share our love;
followed by a leisurely return
through convent paradise
explained by the sign as Propriété privée.

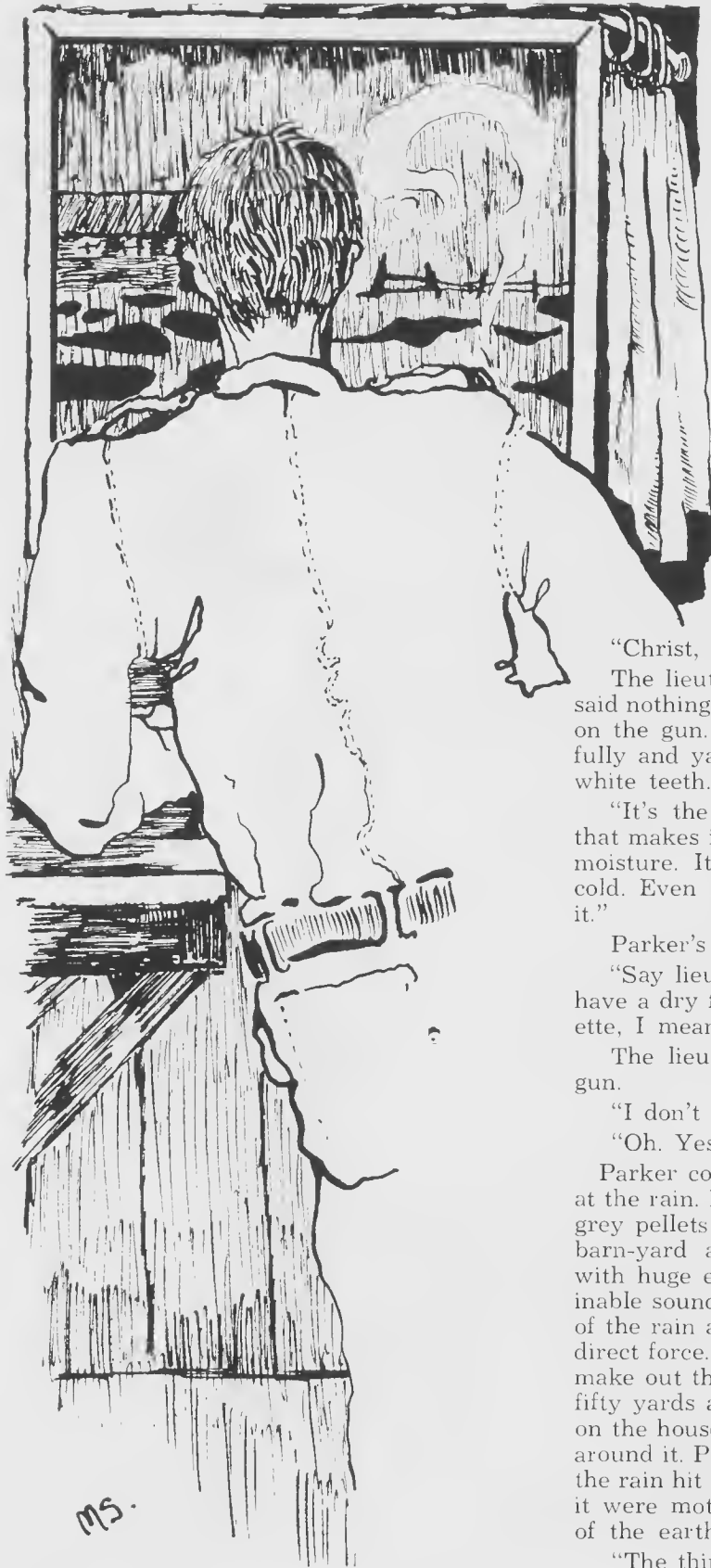


DISAVOWAL

there is a half soul
(let us say a friend of mine)
whose eyes cannot
come to meet
those of his children
for fear
of seeing
a family resemblance.

AL SHUTE

wheels grind on wheels
in widening circles
and I,
though I made them,
watch helplessly
as they come round my way
and I wonder
why I started them rolling
in the first place.



THE MARE

By W. N.
Callaghan, Jr.

"Christ, it's cold!"

The lieutenant looked up at Parker and said nothing. His hands worked methodically on the gun. He looked down at it distastefully and yawned, showing an even row of white teeth. He disliked Parker.

"It's the rain, you know. It's the rain that makes it so goddamned cold. The damn moisture. It rots everything and makes it cold. Even the goddam fags are soaked in it."

Parker's voice lost its hardness.

"Say lieutenant, you wouldn't happen to have a dry fag on you would you? A cigarette, I mean. Sir."

The lieutenant continued to look at his gun.

"I don't smoke."

"Oh. Yes, that's right. I forgot."

Parker continued to look out the window at the rain. It came down in sheets of heavy grey pellets that bored into the mud of the barn-yard and broke the interior silence with huge erosive swells of brutal, interminable sound. There was no slant to the fall of the rain and it hit the earth with a clean direct force. Through it Parker could barely make out the dull red mass of the barn not fifty yards away. The rain seemed to centre on the house and cut it off from everything around it. Parker was entranced by the way the rain hit the soil and smashed into it as if it were motivated by a tremendous hatred of the earth. Almost a suicidal hatred.

"The thing is . . ."



Parker forgot what he was going to say. He had nothing to say. He shivered again and placed a dirty finger against the cold sheet of glass. The flesh under his nail turned white beneath the hard pressure.

"The thing is . . ."

He had fallen into the same trap. He had nothing to say. But he had to drown out the sound of the rain.

"The thing is the way it keeps coming. Four days and it hasn't stopped."

Parker paused thoughtfully. With his free hand he reached into a pocket and took out a small battered tin. He flipped off its top with his thumb and expertly withdrew a cigarette. Carefully he pressed the top of the tin back into place and put it into his pocket. He flicked his lighter open and lit his cigarette. He inhaled with satisfaction. The tin had kept it dry. The finger of his other hand remained against the window, pointing at the rain.

"O'Neil says it's almost this shitty in Ireland," continued Parker thoughtfully. "He says nothing is as shitty as Ireland. And its goddamned weather. Except England and here. And you know, I asked him if he'd ever been to Ireland." Parker pulled his finger from the window, licked the cold from it and faced the lieutenant. "Do you know what he said? He said that he'd never been near Ireland, but that he knew what it was like because he could feel its shitty weather in his veins and that it was almost as shitty as the weather here, but not quite.

In his goddamned veins, he said. The crazy bastard!"

Parker laughed, ignoring the stern silence of the lieutenant.

"And do you know where he is now?"

The lieutenant continued to polish the barrel of his gun.

"He's out in this goddamned rain looking for a goddamned stud for the Frenchy's mare. He said he saw one about half a mile down the road and then went to get it in this goddamned rain. He said that he wouldn't return without a stud for the Frenchy's mare. And the whole countryside's crawling with Jerry snipers. Christ, I told him to forget it and save the mare for himself, but he went anyways."

Parker began to laugh. Then he stopped. The lieutenant looked up at him and placed his gun carefully by the chair.

"O'Neil's a fool."

The lieutenant's face grew red. His hands were clenched and shaking.

"And you Parker, watch your language!"

Parker snapped to attention.

"Yes sir!"

Then he relaxed, putting his forehead against the window. Gazing at the rain.

"O'Neil's a crazy bastard all right," he said quietly to himself.

The lieutenant stared at Parker's back. He disliked Parker. Parker was not a good soldier. He lacked discipline and the lieutenant could not understand why they were billeted together. The lieutenant considered

himself a good soldier. His body was well trained and his face showed no emotion. He enjoyed being saluted. He hated Parker's inane profanity. The lieutenant did not like anybody but he could put up with O'Neil. O'Neil saluted him and showed him respect, even though he was too undisciplined to be a good soldier. The lieutenant could not understand why O'Neil had gone out in the rain. The rain was irritating because it had brought him into contact with Parker.

H.Q. had considered the problem carefully, they said. Their army was bogged down in the rain. The enemy was bogged down in the rain. Both forces had enough short range artillery to repel any attack by the other. Without air support and a devastating barrage of heavy artillery an attack by either side would fail. After considering these facts carefully H.Q. had decided to give the army a rest. Orders were to billet and relax. The lieutenant did not like this. It gave him too much time to think. H.Q. had decided that, except for the usual guards and snipers, discipline should be relaxed. It had been a long war. Names were drawn out of a hat. The lieutenant had drawn O'Neil and Parker. He felt that this was one of the greatest mistakes of the war. The lieutenant knew that his fellow officers did not like him, but he felt more comfortable with them because they were good soldiers. He could be professional with them. They told him that it would give him a chance to know his men. And he knew that Parker was mocking him. He was sure of it.

And Parker's fascination with the rain was almost terrifying. The lieutenant avoided looking out of the windows. He found little things to do which would take his mind off of the constant sound of the rain beating against the roof and the ground; the sound of it as it splashed from the overflowing eaves. But Parker seemed to enjoy the violence of it—the way he could watch it for hours at a time. The rain seemed to eat away at something in the lieutenant. Like Parker. The thought of the mare and O'Neil's stud made him feel something inside loosen. Begin to break. It had been a long war. But he was a good soldier. But Parker was mocking him with his profanity. He knew that Parker was baiting him. No respect. The way Parker talked. And watched the rain.

The lieutenant got up and walked stiffly and quietly up the rotting stairs to the bathroom. He walked stiffly because he was the lieutenant. He walked quietly because he didn't want to wake the old man. And he didn't want to draw Parker's attention away

from the window. He passed the old man's room and heard a woman's muffled sobbing. The old man was dying.

When they had come he had run from them in terror. They had come early in the morning and he had heard them and had run from the house with only his underwear on. He was so terrified. They had laughed at him. Parker and the others. At the fat old man running across the fields. Naked, except for his underwear. His loose white skin flapping, and his tremendous belly hanging out over the hysterical motion of his legs. As if he were running from the end of the world. Across the fields until he stumbled and fell into some barbed wire—not the barbed wire of armies. His own barbed wire. They had to carry him back to the house. He was bleeding and unconscious. The bacilli had entered his body and slowly he was dying of tetanus, the muscles of his body tightening around him. Growing rigid.

The bathroom stank of lime and human excrement. The receptacle for the waste had been built down the side of the house. There was no plumbing. The air was heavy with the dampness and the smell. The lieutenant looked down the hole as he undid his fly. The smell was almost overpowering. Two years of that smell and he still had not gotten used to it. He stepped closer to the hole listening to the rain. He could feel his bladder relax. He stepped closer to the hole. A tiny invisible trickle of water, cold and excruciating hit his neck and he jumped back. Urine splashed over the floor and down the front of his pants. He cursed. It was a new leak, directly over the hole. He would have to wait until his pants dried. Parker would make some comment.

Carefully the lieutenant pumped some water into a basin and washed his hands. He looked at his face in the mirror. It was handsome, and impassive. He had a large smooth chin that gave his face an authoritative strength, and a long finely shaped nose which was almost effeminate. He tightened his cheek muscles. The face remained the same, the face of a good soldier. No emotion. Hard and disciplined. But handsome because of its large chin and finely shaped nose. No scars. He washed his hands again. And saluted himself. The eyes stared back at him coldly. He took out his razor, touched its edge experimentally. A single slash. He shaved for the third time that day. And then walked stiffly and quietly past the room of the old man.

Parker turned as he heard the lieutenant

come down the stairs. He was flushed. A bottle of wine was balanced precariously on the window sill.

"Still no sign of O'Neil, sir."

The lieutenant nodded.

"I guess maybe that old mare will have to go without again. That is if I don't keep up with this drinking. But maybe I just might get pissed and take care of her myself. Booze is a great humbler they say. It makes beasts of men, that's what I heard sir. And maybe there's something to it at that. Care for a drink?"

He reached clumsily for the bottle. The lieutenant turned away and stood with his back to Parker.

"You are drunk Parker."

Parker shrugged his shoulders and took a drink.

"That's good stuff they have here Sir. Too bad you're not a drinking man. Like me. You could appreciate good stuff like this. But in a way I sorta hope that O'Neil finds the stud for her. The mare I mean. I get quite a kick out of stuff like that. Not perverted, I mean, but it makes you feel good to know that some things aren't changed. Going without it makes you wonder if the stuff still exists. If O'Neil finds a stud for the Frenchy's mare, it'd sure boost my morale. Christ I bet half the division's here if he finds it. But I guess guys like you can go without it. You can't miss what you've never . . ."

"Shut-up Parker! You are drunk."

"Aw, I was only just joking. Sir."

"I'll have you court-martialled."

Parker laughed and finished off the bottle.

"You can roll me in barbed wire like the Frenchy."

The lieutenant thought of the clean edge of the razor. He stiffened.

"You are drunk Parker."

"And I do not fear death by bullet, bomb, firing squad or army cook."

He pressed his hand against the window.

"But Christ it's goddamned cold out there. I wonder how O'Neil is making out."

"I won't court-martial you Parker," the lieutenant could feel his anger rise within him, anger at himself and the way that the urine had splashed on his pants, "Because the army is to relax and discipline is to be relaxed. And because you are drunk."

Parker shivered.

"Christ it's cold."

"But let me tell you. You are not a good soldier. You are a disgrace to the uniform. You are . . ."

The lieutenant felt that his words were ridiculous and stopped. He remembered the black hole in the bathroom and its smell and the trickle of water down his neck and his urine splashing on the floor and his pants and he felt ridiculous.

"I know what I am," Parker's voice was low. "And I wish that I could be a good soldier."

He placed the empty wine bottle carefully on the window sill.

"I give the army a bad name," he sounded serious, "And I wish that I could be like you. Have your discipline, and dignity, and principle, and strength, and respect, and integrity, and honour. And all the other stuff that you have too."

The lieutenant thought that he was being sarcastic but Parker's voice was full of sincerity. It sounded ridiculous.

"And I remember," continued Parker, "Hearing stories about how some boot-slagger in the First World War would shoot his C.O. in the back. Just on principle. But I sure wouldn't do that. I'd be lost. I wouldn't know where to go. Or what to do. Without guys like you to set an example. Shit, what weather! Oh ya. I meant to ask you. How's the Frenchy?"

Something inside the lieutenant seemed to be broken by the cruel sound of the rain. He thought of the razor and its edge against his face. Parker was mocking him, but something was growing inside him which prevented him from being angry. He thought of the old man's disease slowly tightening beneath the soft flabby surface of his body. And the whiteness of the old man's body as he ran across the fields. The razor had felt good against his face, its clean brutal edge. The lieutenant turned and looked out the window, past Parker, to the rain. He felt something inside him begin to erode. Very slowly come apart.

"I didn't," the lieutenant cleared his throat, "I didn't look in. His wife is crying so I . . . I suppose he's about the same."

"It's a rotten deal for him, that's for sure," Parker lit his cigarette, "I mean he can't even say that he died of a war wound. I wonder why he ran away from us like that?"

"I suppose he was afraid that we might do something to him. Or perhaps he just broke. I've seen people like that. They take so much and then. And then they can't take any more. And they run."

"Sir. Do you think he acted like a coward? I mean, I'd like to know. What you think."

Parker took a long calculated drag on his cigarette. The lieutenant put a hand to his eyes. Parker was baiting him again. The lieutenant's eyes were sore and strangely cold and the constant sound of the rain above him made him feel alone. And the lieutenant remembered that he must maintain discipline.

"The old man is," the lieutenant paused, "Is not a soldier."

Parker laughed.

"But what if he had been one of us. I mean would you think we were cowards, if we did that?"

"You're a soldier."

"But if I broke like that, what would you think?"

"I don't know. It's . . . It's a different thing when you are a soldier," the lieutenant remembered the first time he had wanted to run, "A soldier isn't supposed to run. He has his duty to his country to fight. The old man wasn't a soldier. He," the lieutenant remembered how he had trembled and wet his pants, "It's different."

"What do you mean?"

"Just, that it is different."

The lieutenant was angry, more at himself than at Parker. His words sounded unconvincing to him; he sounded ridiculous. Parker always made him sound ridiculous.

"Look Parker, that's enough."

"Sure. Sir. Do you want some of this?"

Parker pulled another bottle out from under a cushion on a chair.

"No. I don't drink."

"That's too bad. Sir. This is good stuff."

"You will leave money for it. Parker."

"Yes. Sir."

Parker was smiling.

"Do you understand Parker!"

"Yes. Sir."

The lieutenant turned his back to Parker. His words seemed regulated by the sound of the rain. They were quiet, very controlled words but his hands were shaking as he held them clasped before him. And his wrists ached.

"I am not going to have you court-martialled Parker, because we were ordered to relax discipline and give the troops a rest. However, I would be very careful of what you say from now on. Relaxed discipline is on thing, insubordination is another."

"Yes. Sir."

Parker was smiling.

"Do you understand Parker!"

"Yes-ir!"

"And remember that you are a soldier."

Parker nodded, popped the cork from the wine bottle, set it down. He saluted.

"Yes. Sir," he picked up the wine bottle and looked through it at the light, "Good wine. I wonder when O'Neil will be back?"

"Yes," the lieutenant felt his chin; he felt awkward standing with his back to Parker, but he was afraid to turn around, "Well Parker, you watch for him. I'm . . . I'm going upstairs to, to shave."

He paused. Parker continued to look through the bottle. And said nothing.

"Well."

The lieutenant slowly turned and faced Parker and seeing him ignoring him, felt awkward.



"Yes."

He went up the rotten stairs. His shoulders were slightly slumped.

Parker looked at the bottle. He shook it and watch the sediment settle.

"What do you say wine?"

He held it out to the dark window and the rain.

"A queer fellow. What? You're a good wine."

He took a long drink and slumped down in a chair, putting up his feet on a table.

"Yes. Sir. You go for a shave."

He held the bottle at arms length and looked at it. Thought of the rain, the way it tore into the ground with tremendous hate. It awed him, the way the rain broke the earth. It awed him.

"Hell, I bet his majesty is whacking his royal tack. Change of oil for the general."

He laughed gently and drank again. Then put his hands to his eyes and bent over sobbing. Then he thought of O'Neil out in the rain looking for a stud for the Frenchy's mare. He felt better. Then. And went to the window to watch for O'Neil and the stud. The lieutenant had told him to watch. It was growing dark. And looked cold.

"Has he come yet?"

The lieutenant's face looked red. He had a small red cut across his cheek-bone. A tiny ridge of blood formed along it. The lieutenant reached up and smeared it dry. His hand was shaking. A tiny ridge of blood rose along the small red cut on his wrist. Parker could hardly see it. Perhaps he was mistaken.

"No sir. Nothing but rain."

"It is cold."

"Yes sir."

The lieutenant's hand was shaking.

"Perhaps if . . . Perhaps I will have some of that wine. Parker. You said that it was good wine. Perhaps I will try it."

Parker handed him the wine. The lieutenant swallowed. He looked tired. He noticed that Parker's eyes were red.

"Thank-you Parker."

The old man coughed weakly upstairs in his bed. They heard a woman speak.

"It won't be long now," said the lieutenant.

He had a vision of the old man's flesh tightening around him. Slowly crushing the soft living thing inside.

"Yes sir."

"Perhaps we could take up a collection. I was thinking Parker. That maybe we could take up a collection for the old man. To give him a decent burial. Maybe a headstone or something. What do you think Parker?"

"I think that would be nice sir."

"Parker, I . . ."

"Yes sir."

The lieutenant jerked his head up, holding out his large pink chin. He looked very authoritative.

"Then we'll do that," his voice was very official. "You will remind me before we move up to the lines. Right Parker?"

"I think I hear something."

"Answer me Parker!"

"I think I hear something."

Parker went to the window. He looked out and sifted through the rain for the tall figure of O'Neil.

"Salute me Parker!"

And the stud for the Frenchy's mare. He could almost see the old man propped up on his pillows watching as the animals came together and coupled. The stud with his knackers rolling, mounting the mare. And the old man watching with his mouth open. And the lieutenant watching.

"Parker! Salute me!"

The lieutenant watching their slow clumsy beautiful motion as they mated. He could hear O'Neil's laugh and could feel O'Neil's hand slap his back.

"It's a beautiful thing, Parker. It's a beautiful thing, even for a couple of crap-pers like us."

And he would say, "Jesus!"

"I demand that you salute me!"

"It sure is! Reminds me of home."

"I've taken enough from you Parker. I . . . I . . ."

There was nothing in the rain. They heard the dull report of a rifle about half a mile down the road. It sounded like a sniper. Two more shots. The lieutenant remained silent. Parker didn't bother to look at him. They could hear the old man coughing and the woman talking quietly upstairs and the sound of the rain. Parker moved his hand and knocked the empty wine bottle off the window sill. He closed his eyes.

"I don't think O'Neil will be coming sir."

He said.

Parker heard the lieutenant's slow footsteps as he walked up the stairs to shave.



CARESS

by Al Klassen

I

I felt a spirit from the air
Possess the night, with gentle fingers
Comb the street lamp's rigid glare
Into soft nooks (enjoyment lingered

Taking sweet pleasure of your face),
Sweep my hand with the stricken grace
Of golden leaves on inky air,
To stroke in passing your auburn hair.

II

A manic joy swept from the northern lights
Lifting dead leaves in a frenzied dance,
Whipping our skin with identical sting,
Whirling us momentarily into one.

The rain came, and a flood along all
boundaries.
I saw my brain float by, a lost asylum,
And heard the drowning cries of prisoned
words
And felt my shore-bound body shaken by
the dance.



don't jump off the teeter-totter when someone
is high

ian groves

You never forget where you put a roach because if you do you can get very seriously busted so i layed mine carefully in a crack in the curb beside the car where i know i could find it again i even memorized a little crack beside the crack just to make sure and then and only then did i go zocming off into cosmic consciousness and aim my body shell at the music where even the power lines that fed electricity in the building were vibrating in sympathy with the music like my teacher at the cottage school ringing a handbell to call me back from recess the bell shook her whole arm

with the vibration of up and down and come and learn and come inside but don't jump off the teeter totter when someone is up and you are down or teacher will spank so i promised myself there and then that i'd never be that mean to anyone and bring them down hard with a thump because i knew just how high i was then and i sure didn't want to come down hard with a bump like a cop finding a roach in your car and busting you so i promised right then to teacher that i wouldn't and saluted the powerpoles thanking them for the reminder about the cottage school that i once broke

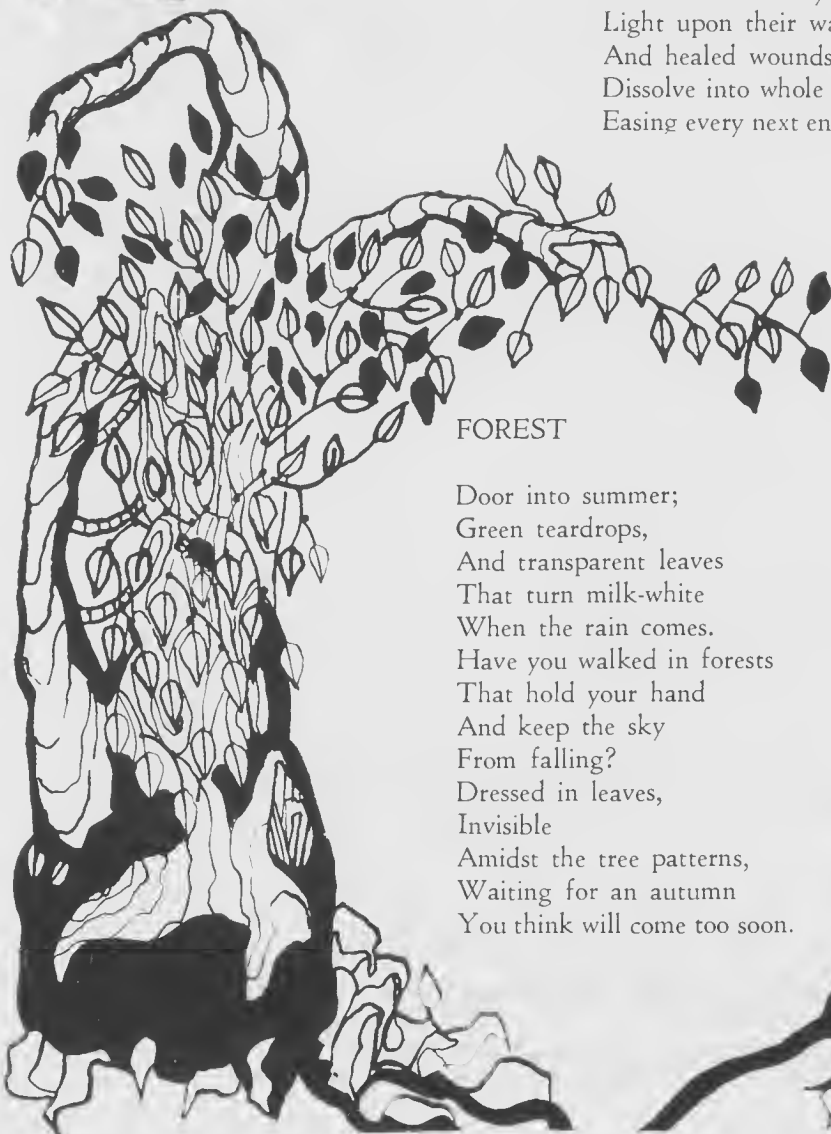
into during the summer holidays and ruined the still wet varnish on the floor with my running shoes that left tracks for the police to track me down with so i guess my runners were a roach in my car only now i'm more careful not to leave roach tracks around but that time was really a gas because we used the curtain rods in the school to play swords complete with a certain rod scabbard because they were the round brass kind that slid in and out smooth but we dented them up pretty bad sword fighting so we took the red cross money someone had so generously left behind and went down town and bought two cap pistols complete with caps and pearl handles but the finger holes were not the neatest i've ever spun in fact guns are a pile of shit and a padlock which we didn't really want but wanted the keys for anyway because it was very important to my brother and i to have keys in our packet so we had a discussion and decided that so's not be to be wasteful we should use the lock for something so we went back to the cottage school and locked the swings together and because my brother is dead now i'm really glad that we did that together even if we did get caught from our running shoes on the fresh varnish but vicky the waitress wants to know where i'm going to sit and if i want a coke to drink or a beer while i'm listening to the music so i order a cake and the smallest tiniest most thin pin thin straw she can russle up because the coke really tickles your mouth and lasts a long time while you listen to music and besides i'm almost broke which is really a drag sometimes but i don't care about that now because i can feel the vibrations through the wooden rail running around the gallery and my foot is tapping on the wooden floor in time with it and it's like a teacher teaching me in the cottage school only here i'm here to learn what rhythm is all about and i'm learning just fine thankyou thanks for asking but then this chick comes toward me and i recognize her limp and she's nuts toa and she's not my type i know her because we were both extras in a zany chewing gum commercial that was using non-union extras because of a hassle with the union and all she could do was stand around because if she walked she stood out and detracted from the performance what ever that was so she says hello and sits with me and i can't think about her much less remembering her name so i nod at her and go back to the music and my foot stomping

which i enjoy much more than her anyway but vicky comes by so i order a beer for me and give the girl my coke because i want to get drunk and forget about this nutty girl entirely and i know that one beer will do the job just fine thankyou thanks for asking but when the music finally ends and it's home time and she's still there beside me she's propositioning me and what the hell i'm easy so we start to leave together only there is another chick at the door who wants a ride to the valley i overheard her saying and as i'm already hassling with the chick about whose car to take i say come with me because i just happen to have two harmonicas in my pocket and one has your name on it if your name is m hohner which i pronounced mmmhonour so the other disappears from my life forever and the hitch hiker and i head our body shells in the direction of my car and i am explaining that i don't go all the way to the valley but i can take her to sunset and la brea which is right on her way and she is delighted and also she is a ruben she is voluptuous she is young and plump-soft and has the cool of a pot head so away we go to my place to roll a couple of joints and then i will drive her home i say only when we get to my place and get through a couple of joints she turns on to the guitar and i to take the harmonica and we sing house of the rising sun through our noses like judy henske but i haven't made a pass at her yet and all of a sudden she wants to leave so i plead mercy for my erection on purely rational grounds and we make love in some strange position i've never been quite able to imitate since then and now i'm too darn tired to drive her to the valley so out she goes to continue her hitch-hike and i crash on the bed for the night or what's left of it and when i wake up i decide to have roaches for breakfast which i put in the end of a cigarette and call cocktails so i'm having a cocktail for breakfast when zap i realize i left my other roach in the crack with the crack beside it back at the ash grave where the music was so i get into my car and drive faithfully back and sure enough there the little devil is where i left it and it's a big roach too so i blow it right there and to hell with the law and i remember the power lines vibrating to the music and my teacher at the cottage school ringing the end of recess hand bell that shook her whole arm with the vibrations of come and learn and come inside but don't jump off the teeter totter when someone is high . . .



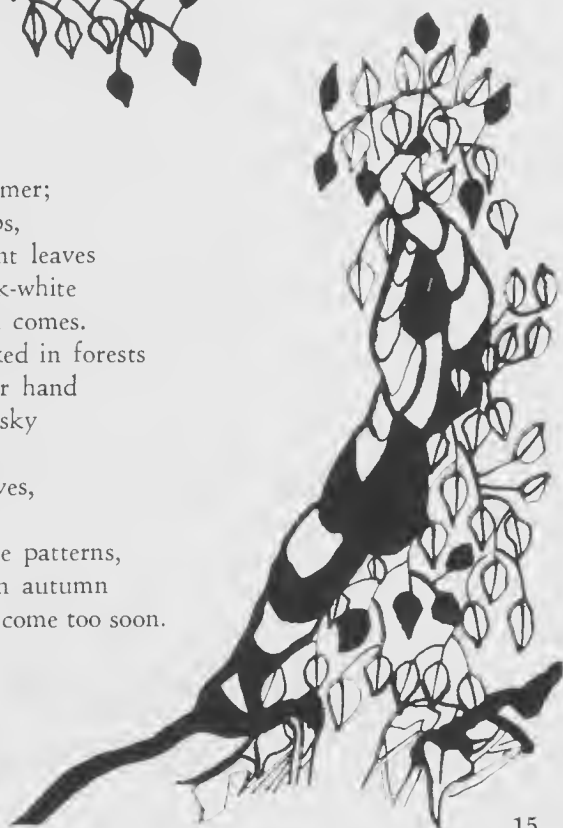
BECOMING

White flashes in the crystal dome;
The sky is my body,
Stabbed by every shattered shard
Grimace on the face of glass.
Carved, with my layered diamond,
Doorway to perfect sun seen,
Where crystal dome and avatars
Fade beside the daytime
Light upon their walls,
And healed wounds
Dissolve into whole sky parts,
Easing every next entry and exit.



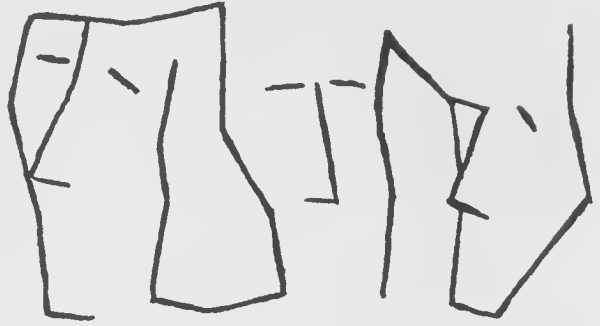
FOREST

Door into summer;
Green teardrops,
And transparent leaves
That turn milk-white
When the rain comes.
Have you walked in forests
That hold your hand
And keep the sky
From falling?
Dressed in leaves,
Invisible
Amidst the tree patterns,
Waiting for an autumn
You think will come too soon.



THE CULTURAL DESERT

By
Troy Reid



Our brothers pay no attention to us
In this Dominion from Sea to Sea.
In the East they look South—
In the West they look South—
And we look from one to the other.

The 'creative' people
With atrophied mammaries
come grasping around us,
Take our money
and insult us.

Craven, cultural derelicts
they say,
In a glut of insensate materialism.
But we people of plastics
walk inwardly—

So they can't find us.
We People of Plastics walk inwardly
Knowing
That time soon shall make room for us.

Have we been the bread basket of Canada
for nothing?
Haven't we felt them gorging on the belly
of us, of Canada,
eating our flesh in remembrance of
bread,
Their mouths obeying obscenities
Cursing us for Bible Belt hypocrisies?

Then let them shit their creative shit
And fill their souls as a backhouse
Then when they're done
We'll tip them over and spread lime
And write
'our brothers once were here,'

People of the Plastics
know
that Canada must grow from the centre
We have invented the 2nd Century
While on the coastal periphery
They climb on to southern technology
And catapult into world fantasy
And careen wildly into waiting foreign
shores

Seeking their centers of culture,

Canadians, 'Whares to the World'.

While the People of Plastics
walk inwardly, silent
and carve crosses for their brother's
foreign graves.

Faceless Edmonton
Home of 200,000 wintry dreams.
Why should we mirror an old face
For the old faces of the established
mistakes?

We,
deserted people
texture our world
With glass and cold
And are indifferent to 1st century aesthetes.
with snow for our thoughts
and spring for our hearts
and hope in the frozen North
we talk inwardly
amongst ourselves
and reflect nothing
far our brothers

Who would have us believe we are dead.

TWO POEMS

by
Marjorie
Bell

through the wine-warm
kaleidoscope
he reached
and broke the
fear-of-doing-something-wrong
seal of resistance;
asked to hold
my paper soul,
and that i might
hold his.
he crumpled my gift
i think,
tossing it from him
as he receded
behind the wall
of muffled snow at predawn.

i
will
remember.
joy's an elusive jester
i do not often see.

Magnificent Sunchild Cree
You hang me up
by the toenails
and empty my pockets
in the rain.

Running from shadow
to sun
and back
you hurt and heal
while I stand
immobile
hands sunk wrist-deep in the cloud
I clench
to brace myself against
the ice water rush—
the shock of your quintessence—
Magnificent
Sunchild
Cree.



THE LOVERS



By
Elan Galper

[A prison. Muted lightning reveals a bearded man of fifty in fetters. HE is short, awkward in movements, with a face marked by blazing eyes. SHE enters. She is a woman of thirty, with a pretty, rather sensitive face.]

HE:

Oh, is it you? The guard just said 'a woman'.

SHE

Sorry I'm not the one you expected.

HE:

I didn't expect any woman on my last day. Least of all you.

SHE:

Why?
Am I not your wife?

HE:

In name only.
Was it very wifely of you to desert your husband?

SHE:

I won't go into that now: I've come for more important things. As for my leaving you, I'm really sorry about it.

HE:

Why be sorry? Didn't you find another man?

SHE:

I didn't leave you for any other man. I've stayed completely chaste after I left you.

HE:

Forgive me. I've judged you too harshly.

SHE:

My reasons weren't so simple. But why talk about such things now? There isn't much time left. When is . . .

HE:

The execution?
Tonight. Tonight
I drink the poison.

SHE:
You talk so calmly—!

HE:
If I screamed and gnashed my teeth,
will it be of any use?
I've made my peace with life:
I'm ready to accept death.

SHE:
You philosophize even
when facing death!
There's something
very unnatural about you:
slaughter a cock—and, by Asclepius,
you'll see how it struggles to live,
how it fears dying!

HE:
But what is death? Maybe it's
nothing to fear?

SHE:
There you go again, philosophizing.
I left you because I couldn't
take it any longer.

HE:
Why?

SHE:
I wish I knew.
I can think of a hundred reasons:
but none of them would be
exactly what I mean.
I felt there was something . . .
not human about you.
You're too abstract. You
search too hard, and think
too deeply. This life
is meant to be lived, not
thought about.

HE:
And slavery,
corruption, oppression, superstition—
must these be a part of life too?

SHE:
I was just a load on you.
—No, don't say I wasn't.
I could feel it.
Each day, as I saw you sitting
with knotted brow, twiddling
your beard and muttering
"What is Truth, then?",
I could feel you thinking
'What does that woman know
of my striving? What does
she, whose mind is full
of the market-price of olives
or of goat's-milk or garlic,
know of my agonies of searching?'

HE:
Did I ever say that?

SHE:
Need you have said it?
You don't have to deny it:
your eyes tell me this.

HE:
. . . In seeking the truth,
everyone is alone . . .

SHE:
So you are ready for death?

HE:
Yes.

SHE:
But there's still time, Socrates!
I came here to tell you
of the plan your pupils have:
they're going to bribe the
guard and let you go free!

HE:
If my freedom
is bought in such a way,
I don't want it.

SHE:
Isn't it
natural to want freedom?

HE:
Freedom
for what? To live and despise
myself for preaching honour and justice
and yet breaking both just to save
one miserable life?

SHE:
Your *own* life.

HE:
My own is not dearer to me
than yours, Xanthippe.

SHE:
But you may live to think about
greater truths . . .!

HE:
It's arrogance to think that Truth
is only one man's property.
What am I?
The oracle of Delphi called me
"the wisest of the Greeks":
yet, what do I know? I know
nothing.

SHE:
But those who condemned you—
illiterate farmers . . .!

HE:

We Athenians have chosen
such a system to govern us:
Democracy, the rule
of the people.

SHE:

Of the ignorant mob?

HE:

Aren't they people, too?
We must enlighten that ignorant mob.

SHE:

By your death?

HE:

Will disrespect for justice
be better?

Tonight, at sunset,
I'll be dead. Athens will be rid
of the stings of another gadfly, of
another who dares to stand his ground
and seek Eternity in the middle
of conformity and transience.

I wanted to give you
the best of what I had to give:
a pure and golden world, a world
of all that's true and changeless.

SHE:

A woman
can't live in eternity, Socrates.

It was wrong of you
to look in a weak, inconstant being
like me, for a golden world of the Infinite.
What could a genius like you find in me?
I'm just a simple, silly woman.

HE:

It would've been
enough for me just to hold
your warm body at dusk, in deep
stillness.

SHE:

You should've stopped me
from going. You were much too kind.

I'm really sorry
I was such a bad wife to you. You
gave me all—too much, in fact—and I
couldn't give anything back. Maybe
if you'd've given less, I wouldn't feel
so full of guilt.

HE:

I've enjoyed the giving: my giving
was a sacred act of love, and my reward
was your happiness at receiving. That
was enough for me.

SHE:

I wanted to show my devotion
by serving you—by giving
all I could

Oh Socrates, if you
could bear the weight of love, then I should
give it,
though I've none to give. I don't even love
myself. [*weeps*]

HE:

Dear Xanthippe! Don't,
dearest! [*comforts her*]

SHE:

[*tearfully*] After all that, you still
call me 'dearest' . . . ?

HE:

I still love you. . . .

SHE:

It's almost not human not to feel
any grudge or jealousy.
Surely I hurt you very deeply.

HE:

Yes; but what hurt me most
was that you couldn't accept
what I gave you from a loving heart.

SHE:

You've been a good man to me:
I'll never forget the effort you made
just to be kind and considerate
to one who didn't even deserve you.

HE:

Maybe I'm not made for married life;
but how I dream of it! Sitting
in the evening by a peaceful fire,
what bliss! And yet,
would it be enough for me? Other men
are content with it; but I'm cursed
with a lust for Truth

SHE:

Wouldn't it have been better
to have left things in their original
mystery? Won't too much questioning
cause disbelief and chaos?

HE:

There's a joy beyond anything I know
in finding the truth hiding behind
masks of superstition, like a grain
of gold hidden by gravel. I want
to see reality as it really is.
Many beliefs will be shattered, it's true,
but what's sound will stay.
That's my ideal, but
what that state is—I don't know yet.
Maybe you're closer to it than I am.

Maybe it's love.

I tried to raise humanity
out of its dark cave of ignorance,
of lies and hatred. I'm sorry
that in trying, I've neglected
my own wife

SHE:

Don't Socrates.
Oh, how things've changed! Once, you were
the center of my life; whatever I did
was only for you. Wherever I went, you
were there with me, guiding me, pointing
the way. But, a little later, I began feeling
you were too absorbed in other things,
in a lofty, golden world I couldn't share,
and I began to sense a certain deadness
in your always looking too hard at life.
I couldn't live with you any longer.

HE:

I'm sorry . . .

SHE:

It's not your fault. Once I loved
everything about you—even your silly habit
of twiddling with your beard, which now
only annoys me. Though I couldn't
understand
your words, your voice was the loveliest
sound
I knew. But then, something happened . . .
I don't know what.

—I just don't love you
the way a woman should love a man!

HE:

And how's that?

SHE:

I don't know.

HE:

Then how d'you know
you don't love me that way?

SHE:

Yes, it's not very good logic,
but I *feel* it. You understand?

HE:

I do . . .

I still remember
how full our love was; how happy we were
when I caressed your hair as you rested
your dear head on my lap. D'you remember
how we used to walk by the sea, or
in the olive-grove of Artemis, my arm
embracing your waist, and yours around my
shoulders,
with the wind lightly stroking your golden
hair,

and the air so perfumed with lilac. . . .
D'you remember, my dearest Xanthippe?

SHE:

Oh, lovely memories! [*in tears*] I did love
you
very much, Socrates!

HE:

Don't weep, dearest:
your tears are like poison on my heart.
Please, Xanthippe,
forgive me for wanting more than any
woman
could've given. Truth is a hard mistress.
Once in her grip, a man can be satisfied
with nothing else. How I wish simple
pleasures
would've been enough—! But for me, the
flesh
could never be all. I can't drown myself in it.
Even in moments I'm most involved, I'm still
thinking. . . .

VOICE:

Socrates, the sun has set.

HE:

Don't think of me, Xanthippe:
don't be sad.

SHE:

How can I?
—Oh, best of men! How blind I was
not to see it! What am I? A silly woman
who'll be remembered only as she who was
wife to Socrates. I shouldn't've obeyed
my foolish heart: I should've stayed with
you,
and made your search for truth easier.

HE:

No, Xanthippe; I couldn't ask
for such a sacrifice.

SHE:

Must you die now? Now?
Oh, how I want a child
by you—! . . .

HE:

My children
will suffer as I do,
for Truth.
[*They kiss.*] Good-bye, dearest
Xanthippe.

I'm ready now
for the bowl of poison.

SHE:

[*exits tearfully*] Good-bye, dear husband!
Good-bye, my best of men! . . .
[*Blackout.*]



THE CARIBOU

by W. N.
Callaghan, Jr.

They came
brown spots
on the emptiness light
of the snow.

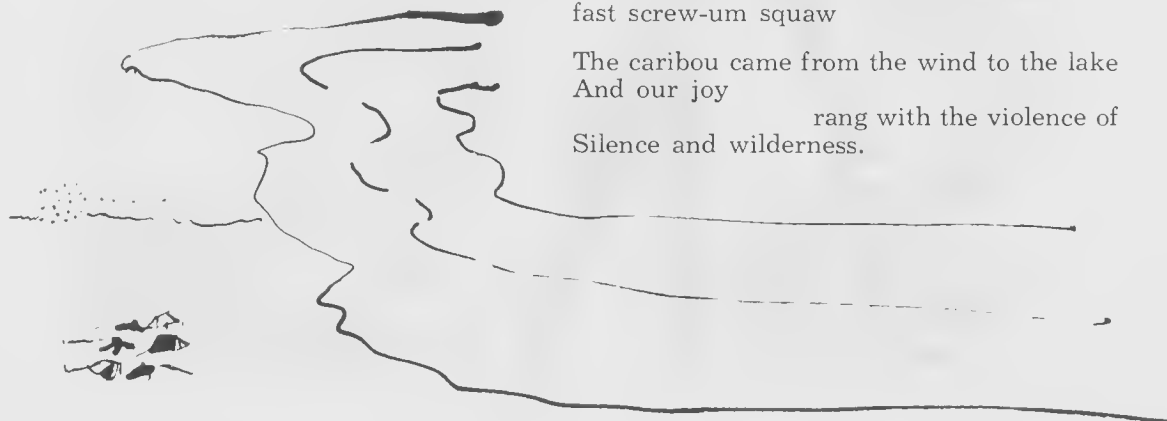
We were cold
in the dim light
of twilight
the day's warmth was bluing
like the pulse of a strangling mistress
under our trembling thumbs

And the dark sound
Of trees dying
along the quiet death of horizon

They came
Swinging closer
brown trapeze figures
from invisible bars
across a transparent
emptiness, loneliness
and ice:
This circus of squeezing suns.

they came
taking their time
like patterns of bleeding
staining like wounds
In the lungs of a wheezing
fast screw-um squaw

The caribou came from the wind to the lake
And our joy
rang with the violence of
Silence and wilderness.





THE TIGER

The formidable clawing beast
 receded, slid down now
 uncornered,
 no noise & fading
 ugly fanged face—
 a mirror walked away from,
 and overly groomed
 I sat down
 an armchair farmer
 with no arresting mounted tiger
 affixed to my eyes,
 minding modest milk caw
 pens and pastures, milk caws
 & milk in quiet reasonable health.

IN UNDENOTED MUSIC

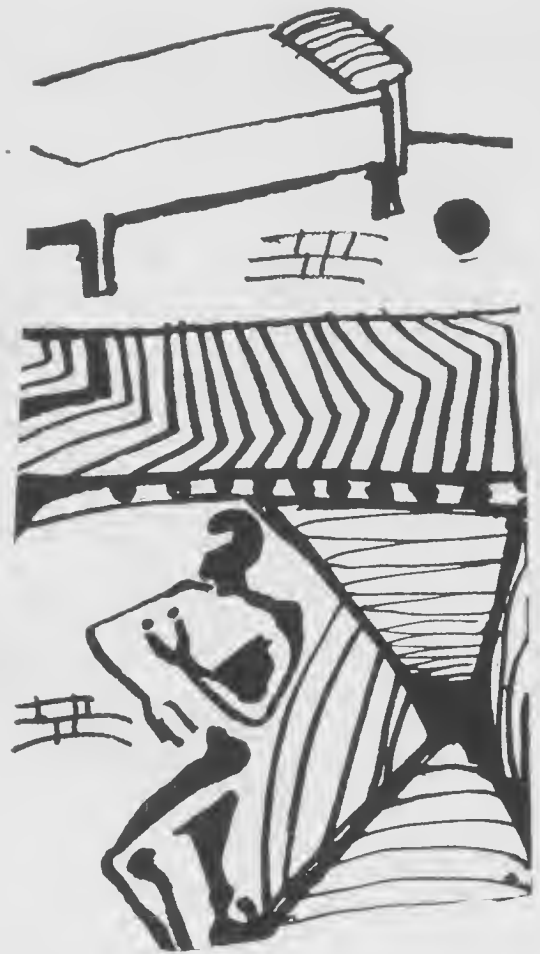
The memory of practising the piano,
 told to keep moving through
 mistakes till next round,
 fades into a cyclic blur
 of black & white, grey piano
 keyboard of dim, undenoted music
 to even a silent
 chinese-dragon vapour trail
 that only grows into discernible
 skywriting with large tenacious
 swings & strides in a cloudless
 uncramped room-to-turn-around-in
 sky, and only on occasion
 as in frosty skating rinks of
 crack the whip we get
 it moving and snap off
 a single, self-sufficient
 piece.

CHARLES NOBLE



PRICKLY POOL

They pooled
their illusions
and danced
a hooded dance
around reflected trees
but couldn't
lift the rock
to splash the pool
that sees
them wet enough,
and unshored
he receded
into woods
chopping down
wet heavy stuff
building up his arm,
reapproached
the pool
pulling off
the hoods
and passing over
shrunk rock
crushed her skull.



THE GARDENER

She got her share
of the fashionable articles
of play-thing-clothing reality
as fashionable as any, but
neither could she take it
nor transcend it,
left it as strewn, unloved garbage
and indeed she dies
as he, gardener, comes along
picking up after and begins
a difficult, intricate ritual
to raise the dead,
planting the garbage in the grave
as a retroactive compost pile
and puts the casket in the attic
as high souvenir,
the very aspiration of the pile
slowly rising in a curing
transformation and when
the garbage gets that high,
as perfect gardener,
he'll bring flourishing life
from every hidden bud
in her delicate bones.

i cried
the day i heard
that miller died
longdistance call
oh hi elaine

i wanted first to laugh
because the thought
of miller's not existing
seemed absurd.

he'd asked me out
just days ago
and i had thanked the trip
for giving me
a reason to say no.

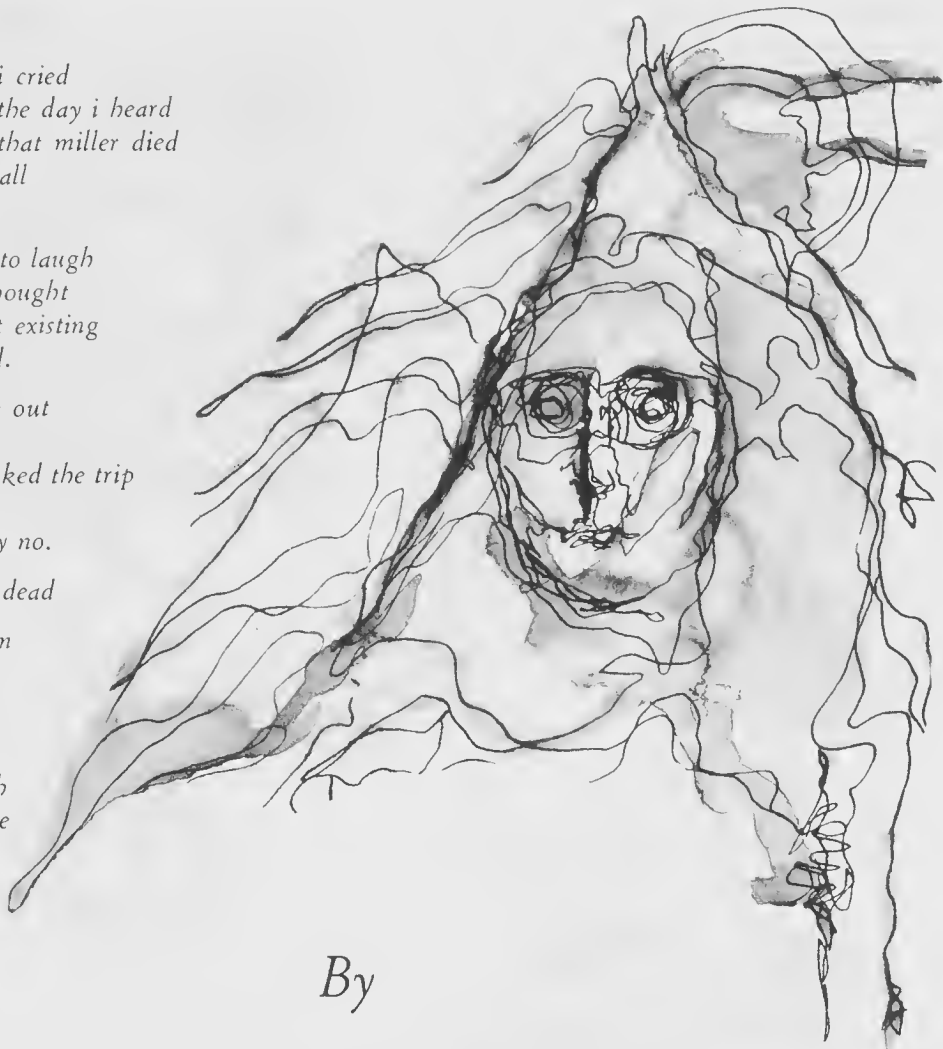
and now he's dead

they found him
in his room

three minutes
almost gone
oh yeah
goodbye

click

...



By

Bernie Goedhart

he's dead

who was it ?

now is the time
to laugh

my hands move up
touch my wet hair

i loved him once

now is the time
to laugh

he's dead
he died alone
he always died
alone

abruptly
tears pour down
my face



The corridor stretched long and white before her. Linda stopped. But turning, there was Brian still at the end of the corridor, watching. She closed her eyes, shutting out the ugly, glaring corridor, and wrapped herself in Brian's overabundant coolness.

Green, white, green, white. Six green and five white tiles and she was there—Room 101, Division of Social Hygiene.

She didn't care what they thought.

The girl behind the desk was wearing green love beads, but there was no way she could make it. She was a hair-in-place, clean to the point of washed-out straight, as warm as a guttering candle. Linda suddenly felt superior: flying over the housetops, spitting at the dirt-digging ant people superior.

"Can I help you?" The candle had noticed her.

"Yeah. . . . This is where I come for a . . . a check-up, ain't it?" She could feel herself falling down, down towards the ant people and the dirt. She didn't crash through.

"Yes, it is." The girl spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, with no trace of condescension or pity and when she started to get up, her beads got tangled around a couple of typewriter keys. Here was what Brian called "a dying breed: the harmless straight."

The beads were untangled and Linda was shown to a waiting room. It was small and painfully white under the fluorescent lights. A bloated Indian woman with a mass of frizzed hair sat on one of the green chairs that lined the room, her fat hanging over the edges. She reminded Linda of the twisted Buddha that Fish had used for burning incense.

Fish. She hadn't thought of him for years and years, it seemed. Yet, in straight time, it could only be six or seven months since he, the long-haired prince in the multi-coloured armour, had rescued her from the grey, ever-roaring dragon of Grade XI, St. Matthew's High, located in a *good* neighborhood, and taken her to a one-roomed castle in Yorkville. She had been so young then. The castle had been a doorway to a thousand new fairy-tale worlds—for a few weeks—then it had become the doorway to less beautiful regions. They had not lived happily ever after.

A YELLOW BOX



By Caterina Edwards

Even though she tried as hard as she could to remember what Fish looked like, his face would not appear, only a blurred impression of long, mournful lines, like an out-of-focus photograph of sorrow.

There was a sudden roar of laughter on the other side of the door. The Indian stubbed out her cigarette violently, disintegrating it. A greaser, still smiling, swivelled out and swayed to the exit, patting and rearranging her over-teased straw-like hair.

It was the Indian's turn.

Alone, a double dose of restlessness and fear washed over Linda. She wasn't one of these women. She didn't belong here. To save herself from drowning, she started fingering the neatly stacked pile of magazines on the chair beside her.

Prim and Proper English Housewife magazines. *Women's Own*, *Women's Realm*, *Women and Home*. How to make blueberry jam, crocheted berets and Christmas decorations. Goopy eternal love stories. A daring article on unwed mothers. Bright, shiny pictures of plastic-coloured food and pink and white girls in frilled dresses. Balanced meals, balanced budgets, balanced time, balanced lives. Another pile of magazines, more scattered, on a dark mahogany table in a sun-filled, green room. "Mother, couldn't we subscribe to something a bit more with it than these things?"

Suddenly, the four walls spun, hostile and strange around her. It was as if a pair of giant scissors had descended from the skies and cut all the threads that connected her to the world. She no longer knew where or what she was. She became an anonymous wandering dust particle in a gigantic alien universe. Finally, the walls straightened.

In revenge, she tore the pages of the magazine she was holding and threw them to the other end of the room. She scattered the rest of the magazine on the chairs and floor. Before she could do more, the door opened again. It was her turn.

She didn't care what they thought. Not any of them.

The nurse had a round, wrinkled face that managed to look both tired and cheerful. She

was sort of like a big pillow covered in white starch. "Hello, dear. How are you? Would you like to sit on that chair over there. I suppose you're here for a checkup? Now, now. There's no reason to look nervous. That's what we're here for." She beamed at Linda from behind an imposing desk covered with different coloured forms.

"I ain't nervous."

"You're not? Well, that's good. No need to be, you know." She picked out a bright yellow form from one of the piles, patted her hair and cleared her throat. "I suppose we can get started. Your full name please?"

She wrote the name in a fat, leather-bound book, opposite a number—then wrote the number in thick red letters across the top of the yellow form. "You're looking upset again, dear. There's nothing to be upset about. We just give you a number to make things more anonymous. It's for your own protection."

Linda felt like screaming "don't call me dear." But she didn't.

"Your address?"

Brian warned her strongly against giving their address. "They come looking for you all the time, on the least pretext," he'd said, "if you give them half a chance." She tried to imagine this starchy white pillow in the dark and usually smoky room she and Brian shared. No one over 25 had ever been in there except for that funny, balding guy who was supposed to be a poet and had come to get the methadrine Brian had brought from Vancouver.

"Uhh, I don't have an address at the moment . . . I . . . I pick up my letters at General Delivery." She had handled that quite well.

"No phone either then?"

"No."

The nurse shook her head at the two blank spaces on the form.

"What's your home address?"

"Huh?"

"Where do your parents live?"

"I have no parents." The nurse arranged her mass of wrinkles into a frown.

"Come, come now. We're not going to con-

tact them. We just want to know where you're from for the files."

Large, rolling lawns, a white house overfilled with children of all sizes, the great green living room that was off limits, the mahogany table.

"208 Scarborough Ave., Millarsville, Ont."

"When were you born?"

"Jan. 8, 1952."

"You're only 16."

"Yeah." If she said so anything about "when I was 16," Linda would scream, she really would. Just like her mother. How often had she said it. Sitting in the living room grinding out cigarette after cigarette in the crystal ashtray on the mahogany table. Strange, how she could remember the living room so well even though she'd forgotten what most of the rest of the house looked like.

"I'm going to take a sample of your blood." The nurse had picked up a large hypodermic needle and a test tube. "It won't hurt."

It didn't. The nurse was quite gentle really. "There." She wrote Linda's number 39081 on the tape pasted to the test tube. "Now while I go put this in the box for the lab you fill out those forms I've laid out on the desk. They're for the government in Edmonton. They like to keep track of things."

The forms were like multiple choice exams at school. There was a statement and you had to circle the right answer with a small space between each question for specifics. Age, education, height, weight, colour of hair, colour of eyes. Marital status? She wasn't sure whether to circle common-law or not. It sounded rather serious and final. She circled single. Place of birth, nationality, race, employment.

The end of the first form. She stretched in her chair, flexing her fingers. This was worse than the multiple choice exams.

"They're sort of a bore, aren't they?" The candle was there with an armload of yellow forms, putting them in the appropriate slots of the divided shelves, hanging above the desk where Linda was sitting. "You should see what it's like typing them all day. Oh—I suppose . . ." She trailed off, seeing the nurse bustle into the room.

"How are the forms coming, Linda? Only one done? Well, we'll have to go a bit faster, won't we? . . . Yes, that form's next." She patted Linda on the shoulder, frowning at the candle as she did so. "As for you, Miss Evans, I'd appreciate it, if you didn't waste the patients' time by talking to them. You know the rules."

"As for you . . . as for you . . . as for you Linda . . ." How many times had she heard that. Her mother had always reprimanded the others but kept the full force of blame for her. She suddenly felt sorry for the now departed candle.

Kind of contact:

Heterosexual marriage partner

Heterosexual common-law

Heterosexual friend

Homosexual friend

Heterosexual acquaintance

Homosexual acquaintance

Heterosexual pick-up

Homosexual pick-up

Heterosexual prostitute

Homosexual prostitute

She read it over several times but couldn't reconcile any of the neat little niches with what was between Brian and her. Their love was a torch light. It wasn't *contact*.

"Linda, I don't like to hurry you but we haven't got all day, have we?"

Amount charged or received.

Number of contacts with disease.

Number of different partners in sexual intercourse in past month.

Had she been Brian's woman a month? Perhaps not, but it seemed a month. At least. There'd been others—before Brian and after Fish. Nameless and faceless now. Mere bodies, white or brown geometric shapes, some denser and heavier than others.

"You're finished? Good." The nurse took the forms and began looking them over. "Now I just have to ask you one or two more questions, then I can give you the shot and we'll be all through. . . . Let's see. . . . You're unemployed? You'd think a nice, strong girl like you could find plenty of jobs. What do you live on?"

Linda shrugged her shoulders, concentrating on the green and white linoleum. Brian had warned her not to say anything.

"Well, suit yourself. You don't have to tell me. . . . Umm . . . only one contact. His name, please? . . . You're going to have to tell me his name, or if you don't know his name, at least a description, so we can get in touch with him."

Linda didn't bother shrugging her shoulders this time. She kept on staring at the linoleum. "Listen, it's for his own good."

"You don't have to worry. He's been to a doctor."

"So, you're still seeing him. He's a Calgary boy?"

"No . . . no, he's from Vancouver. He was just passing through. One night."

"But you know he went to a doctor."

"He wrote . . . when he got to Van . . . to tell me I better see someone."

"I still need his name."

"Oh . . . Michael. I don't know his last name."

"His address?"

"I don't know."

"It's not on the letter."

"No."

"What does he look like?"

"Real groovy. Tall, blue eyes, long blond hair, wears neat gold-rimmed glasses."

The nurse wrote quickly. Linda smiled inside. Good old Michael. Served him right. Who was he to sit there, all self-righteous and condemning. Smoking Brian's hash at the time, yet. After all, Brian took the risks.

"Where did you meet him?"

"At a party."

"Your friends' party?"

"Yeah."

"You don't have to look so weary. One last question. Are you a hippie?"

"No." The nurse raised an eyebrow. "I'm not a hippie." Funny, one of the first true statements she'd made and the old pillow didn't believe her. She and Brian weren't hippies. She'd often heard him say so. Fish—he'd been one. And those kids that bought stuff off of

Brian. Idealistic. Love the world. She knew better. With Brian, she'd learned. Only they two mattered. Only they two. Two.

The nurse took out a bottle from a yellow box and filled a hypodermic needle. "We won't know for sure, of course, till Monday, but we'll give you a shot today for security. And you better come back tomorrow. Can you come at the same time?"

"Yeah."

"Good. . . . There. . . . All finished. Well, see you tomorrow. You keep away from those men you hear?"

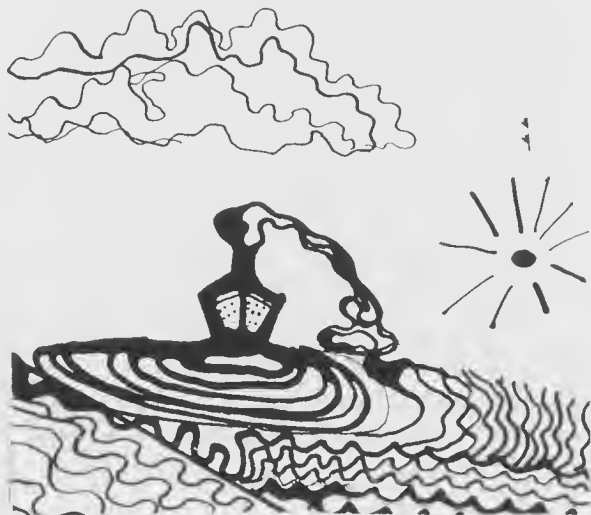
"Yeah."

"Next."

Brian was waiting for her at the end of the corridor. He usually never waited for anyone. "Wasn't too bad, was it love?" He pulled her close to him and kissed her slowly.

"Nah." She smiled up at him, then buried her head in his shoulder. "I didn't mind." For a second she wondered about his other girls, but all her wondering was enveloped in a tremendous tiredness. He took her hand and they walked out of the building. She smiled a lot and told him about the visit. She never told him how their love had been compressed and shut into a yellow box marked penicillin. She never told him how she knew it was the end—the end of the torch lights and the flying way above the dirt people and the beginning, the beginning of an infinite series of long corridors and yellow boxes.

She was tired, so tired.





Three Poems

YOUR SISTER

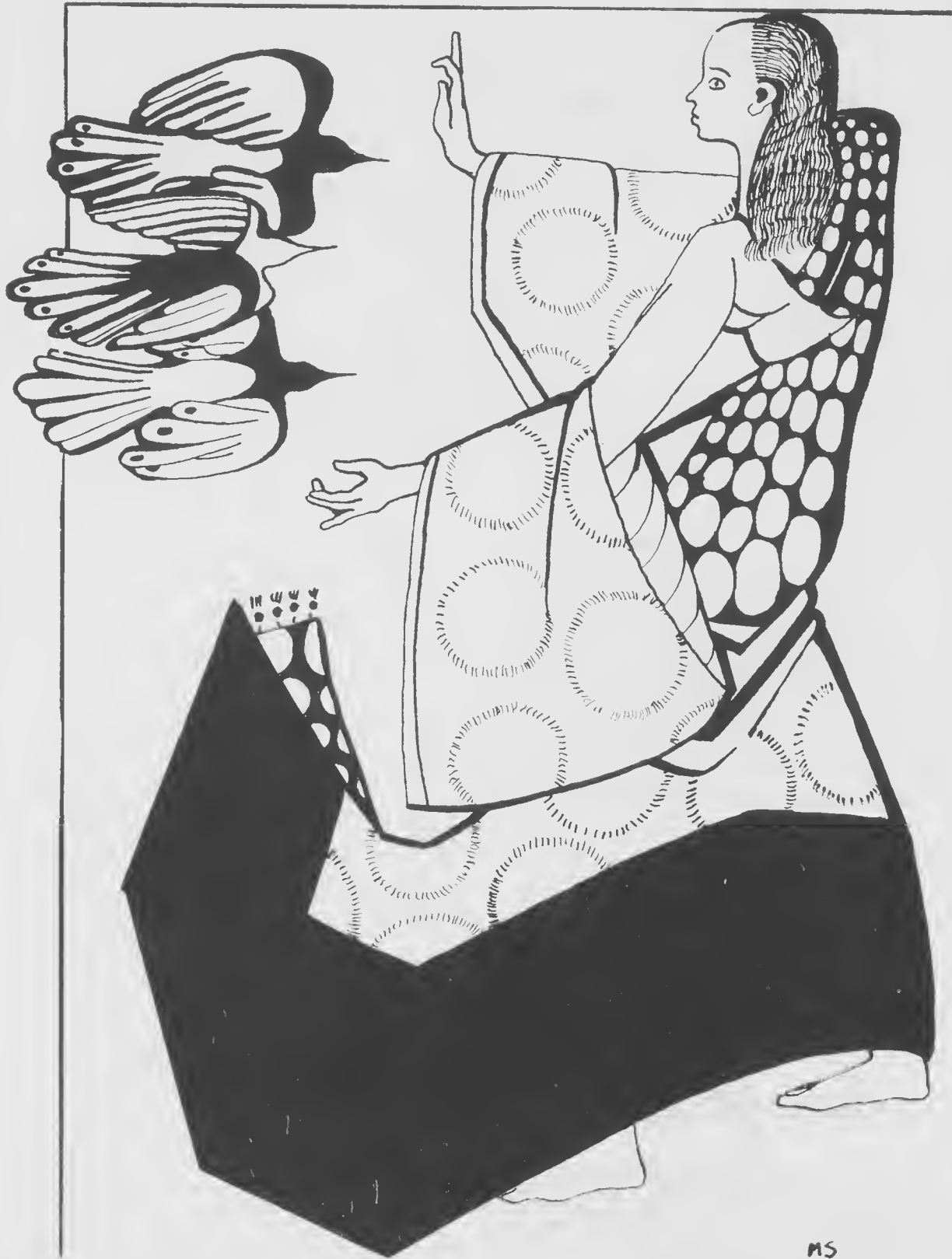
He pours
over her
like
a glass of wine;
she
can allow herself
to be coquettish and capricious.

Waiting for Sunday to end
we spilled red wine
on your bed,
holding some ritual
for buried mistresses.

"Did you notice how jealous I was of you
in that dream?"

By
Ron
Kawalilak

Winter dew
on greening trees
—a robin's nest



MS